

School connectedness as a protective factor for ethnic minority adolescents

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Associations between strong predictors of suicidal behaviors over the life course, such as adverse childhood events (ACEs), remain understudied among youth of color. Although not previously considered high risk, suicide attempts among Black youth increased 73% between 1991 and 2017.

Published in the *Children and Youth Services Review*, University of Minnesota researchers pulled data from the 2016 Minnesota Student Survey (MSS) to examine associations between ACEs, school connectedness and [suicide ideation](#) and attempts among Somali, Latino, Hmong and Non-Hispanic white (NH-white) adolescents from grades 8, 9 and 11.

The research found that:

- over 40% of students reported at least one ACE, and more girls compared to boys reported four or more ACEs;
- Latinas (9.6%) experienced more ACEs compared to Latino boys (4.7%), Somali

- boys (4.4%) and Hmong boys (2.9%);
- there was a similar trend in [suicide](#) behaviors, with all girls reporting more suicide behaviors compared to boys;
- each additional ACE significantly increased the odds of suicide behaviors for all youth, but there were notable differences;
- for Hmong, NH-white girls and Latinas, odds of a suicide attempt increased 60-69% but 109% for Somali girls;
- for Latino and NH-White boys, odds of a suicide attempt increased 70% and 80% for Somali and Hmong boys respectively;
- school connectedness only buffered the association between ACEs and suicidality for NH-white youth and Latinas. However, at higher levels, school connectedness was associated with a higher probability of suicide behaviors among Latinas.

"Suicides are preventable with timely evidence-based interventions. However, to develop effective programs, we need adequate data to identify protective and [risk factors](#) for possible intervention," said Eunice Areba, a clinical assistant professor in the School of Nursing. "Prevention programming should be multisectoral and multigenerational to mitigate intergenerational transmission of the effects of ACEs and trauma along the [life course](#)."

Areba also noted that researchers should examine findings on suicide aggregated into broad categories—such as Black/African American, Latino/Hispanic, or Asian—with caution. Such designations, and the dearth of research on ethnic minority youth can mask a significant rise in suicide that may go unrecognized and unaddressed.

She recommends that schools facilitate connectedness by ensuring learning is meaningful and relevant to adolescents' lives and struggles (normalize their experiences), teachers' pedagogy and curricula should align with students' lived

experiences, and provide clear and consistent expectations for discipline and performance. Additionally, access to multicultural and multilingual teachers and counselors, and supports that affirm adolescents' ethnic and [cultural heritage](#) and identity development can reduce stigma around mental illness, and encourage help-seeking among vulnerable adolescents.

More information: Eunice M. Areba et al, Adverse childhood experiences and suicidality: school connectedness as a protective factor for ethnic minority adolescents, *Children and Youth Services Review* (2020). DOI: [10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105637](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105637)

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